A

SERMON

ON THE LATE

GENERAL FAST,

PREACHED AT

GRAY's INN CHAPEL,

On FRIDAY the 13th Day of DECEMBER, 1776,

BEFORE THE

WORSHIPFUL THE MASTERS OF THE BENCH,

OF THE

HONOURABLE SOCIETY OF GRAY's INN,

AND

PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST.

BY

HENRY STEBBING, D. D.

CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY,

AND

PREACHER TO THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY OF GRAY's INN.

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M DCC LXXVI.

TO

THE WORSHIPFUL

EDWARD MONTAGU, Esq. Treasurer,

And other MASTERS of the BENCH,

Of the Honourable SOCIETY of GRAY's INN,

THIS

DISCOURSE,

preached before them, and publiſhed at their Request,

IS HUMBLY INSCRIBED

by their moſt obliged

and moſt reſpectful

humble ſervant

HENRY STEBBING.

JAMES IV. 10.

Humble yourſelves in the ſight of the Lord, and he ſhall lift you up.

I Know not how I can more properly diſcharge my duty on this occaſion, as a Preacher, or what better guide I can take, either for the ſubject-matter of my diſcourſe, or for a ſuitable method of diſpoſing it, than the Royal Proclamation itſelf, which calls me to this duty, and which, whilſt it commands me to preach, directs me what to preach.

The Proclamation connects two things together, which ought never to be ſeparated in our conduct under the calamities of life,—an *application of human means*, and a *truſt in Divine Providence* for our deliverance from them. A truſt in God without a proper ground of ſuch truſt is but vain preſumption, and a truſt in his help muſt preſuppoſe, as its proper ground, a due uſe of thoſe means, which he hath put in our power to help ourſelves; conſequently our truſt in his protection againſt our enemies does not exclude but requires our application of the neceſſary means of ſelf-defence. On the other hand, as there is no ſecurity in human wiſdom, or in

human ſtrength, without the bleſſing of God's providence, we muſt, beſides applying natural means under our calamities, apply ourſelves alſo to God for help, in whoſe hands are all human events; under the calamity of war we muſt provide what is neceſſary for war, but, though *the horſe be prepared againſt the day of battle*, ſtill, *ſafety is of the Lord.* And there is this uſe, as well as propriety in applying to God for help on ſuch occaſions, that as the application is made to his goodneſs and mercy, it forcibly ſuggeſts to us the neceſſity of behaving ſo as to deſerve it, not barely by providing the implements of war, or by our alacrity in the uſe of them, but, as war is a means in the hand of Providence with which he puniſhes the ſins of a nation, we ſhould farther provide for a removal of the war by a removal of thoſe ſins which may have drawn it upon us.

The Proclamation therefore commands us to *humble ourſelves before almighty God, in order to obtain pardon of our ſins, and to ſend up our prayers and ſupplications to him for averting thoſe heavy judgments, which our manifold ſins and provocations have moſt juſtly deſerved.* As it is preſumption to truſt in God's providence for help without uſing our own natural means, it is no leſs ſo to aſk it, without qualifying ourſelves to receive it, and it ſeems harſh, to aſk God's protection againſt the malice of *our enemies*, whilſt our unrepented offences againſt him render us fit objects of *his anger*; or, to ſollicit farther bleſſings, when the many he hath already vouch-

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ſafed us are not only unthanked but miſapplied. Our ſins, God knows, are many,—too well known to need ſetting forth, and ſome of them too groſs to bear it; they may all be comprehended together under the general ſin of Ingratitude to God; and what ſort of title that is to the favour of God—judge ye. I hope we are not, at this inſtant, adding one ſin more to a nnmber already too great—I mean the ſin of profaning the ſolemnity of this day, by reſorting here, *profeſſedly* with contrition and humiliation, but *really* without feeling the leaſt grain of either. This will be adding a mockery of God to our ingratitude againſt him, and inſtead of beſpeaking his favour muſt raiſe his indignation. The favour we are now met to ſollicit is of the utmoſt importance to us, and ſhould be aſked with ſuitable ſincerity, and with ſuitable qualifications, if we would obtain it; but much more ſo, if under a contrary diſpoſition we not only miſs of the favour we aſk of God, but are in danger of his judgments by our mockery of him.

We are ſolliciting Almighty God, and *imploring his intervention and bleſſing, ſpeedily to deliver our loyal fellow-ſubjects within our colonies and provinces in North America from the violence, injuſtice and tyranny of thoſe daring Rebels, who have aſſumed to themſelves the exerciſe of arbitrary power.* If we are ſuitably qualified to aſk any bleſſing of providence, we cannot at this time aſk a greater; and there is that propriety, as well as importance, in the requeſt, as may well give us

confidence in its ſucceſs, if we aſk as becomes us. The requeſt is agreeable, both to the feelings of humanity, and to the precepts and ſpirit of Chriſt's religion: God, who hath planted the ſentiments of humanity within us, cannot but be well pleaſed, when he ſees us acting under their influence; and Chriſt, who gave us our religion cannot be leſs ſo, when he ſees us acting according to the precepts he hath given us in it. The ſufferings of our loyal fellow-ſubjects in America are great, nor is it more our duty as men, and as Chriſtians, than it is both our duty and intereſt as Engliſhmen to pity and to aſſiſt them, with the utmoſt of our own ſtrength, and, if we may obtain it, with the ſtrength of the Almighty—they are a part of us, a member of our political body, and *if one of aur members ſuffer*, we feel to our ſorrow that *the whole body ſuffers with it*—conſequently, the relief we give, and the relief we ſollicit, we give and we ſollicit for ourſelves.

All ſufferance is grievous; but particular circumſtancs will add both weight and poignancy to it, and the loyal part of the Americans feel the ſufferance of plunder and inſult much aggravated, as the tyrants who oppreſs them are their fellow-ſubjects, and ſtill more, as they are men, whoſe principles are as deteſtable as their conduct is cruel—when men ſuffer under regular government, they ſuffer within reach of redreſs, but when they ſuffer from thoſe who renounce all government, not only miſchief but ruin muſt enſue.

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In this ſituation, as religion directs us to look up to God, as the ſupreme *director* of all human events, however calamitous, ſo it bids us look up to him for our *deliverance* from them. Man may work more miſchief than he can repair, but God inflicts no calamities which he cannot remove; and as he makes uſe of human means in ſending calamities, the ſame means is equally within his reach for removing them; and when he hath permitted wicked and factious men to work up a calamity for the puniſhment of a people, he can as eaſily and effectually direct honeſt and brave men to defeat it, for their relief. Or, as the hearts of men are in the hands of God, he may rectify the hearts of thoſe, who, from diſappointed ambition, from a love, if not a want, of confuſion, would ſacrifice their country to their pride.

Thoſe who have their own ends to ſerve, whether of avarice, ambition or reſentment, will encourage factious principles, wherever they meet with them, and rejoice in the calamities they bring upon the public; and if they are dextrous in purſuing this practice with ſafety, as they often may, they feel not the reflection, that they can never purſue it without guilt, and that it is a practice which the good citizen, who loves his country, and the good man who fears God will always deteſt.

It is worth our prayer to God, that *He* would change the hearts of ſuch men, as perhaps God only *can* effect it, by his grace, or by his judgment, by making them ſenſible of their

guilt in diſturbing civil government, or by ſhewing them the puniſhment it deſerves. Nor is it leſs worth our prayer to God, that he would not only *change the hearts* of thoſe who have *contrived* this rebellion, but that he would alſo *ſtrengthen the underſtandings* of thoſe who have been *deluded* into it, that they may be ſenſible of their error in giving themſelves up to the certain guilt of rebellion for the imaginary advantages accruing from it, if ſucceſsful—I ſay imaginary, for a rebellion which attempts to deſtroy our preſent form of government is as ſurely attended with ruin as with guilt; and thoſe who are engaged in it, ſhould they ſucceed, would find they have been working their own ſlavery, under the falſe notion of promoting the liberty of their country. Knaves, as well as mechanics, muſt both have tools to work with, which when ſpoiled in the working, they, both, throw by as good for nothing; and the deluded Americans, who are inſtruments under theſe leaders in rebellion, even without a divine impulſe, may ſee what they are to expect, by what they themſelves are doing, and in the ruin which they bring on others may read their own.

The laſt, but not leaſt important, article in our prayers to God on this occaſion is—that *he would reſtore our people in thoſe diſtracted provinces and colonies to the happy condition of being free ſubjects of a free ſtate, under which they have flouriſhed ſo long, and proſpered ſo much.* It is ſurely the wiſh, and may well be the prayer, of every one, who is no friend to

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the preſent rebellion, and a true friend to this country and government, that the differences between Great Britain and her colonies may be ſpeedily concluded—in what manner, or on what terms, you will not expect to hear from the pulpit—the Chriſtian Preacher preſumes not to ſet his foot within the lines of government—Yet, the Chriſtian preacher may be allowed, by his profeſſion and office, to recommend obedience to civil government, and to plead the religious as well as civil obligations to this duty—in caſe of diſobedience, it becomes him to recommend conciliatory methods for bringing the diſobedient back to their duty; but when theſe are attempted, and theſe are rejected, the preacher is ſilent—and government will take care—*ne quid detrimenti reſpublica capiat.*

Yet, let us *pray*, on ſuch occaſion, though we may not *preach*; and if we pray that rebellious ſubjects may be brought to a due ſenſe of the obedience they owe to the government, under which God hath thought fit to place them, we pray according to the ſcriptures, and they who live according to the ſcriptures will ſay, Amen. If we pray, that theſe *rebellious* ſubjects may be reſtored to the happy condition of being *free ſubjects of a free ſtate*, it is a prayer, to which the rebels themſelves, if they have common ſenſe, muſt ſay, Amen. Subjects they muſt be; all mankind are ſo; to God and to each other. Abſolute liberty belongs not to imperfect beings; as ſuch, though they be angels, they not only *are*

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ſubject to government, but want it, and cannot attain happineſs without it. Mankind cannot ſubſiſt without government, nor government without ſubjection; and when theſe ſons of liberty (of rebellion rather) diſclaim the government of their mother-country, they diſclaim what they do not deſerve, and fooliſhly, as well as ungratefully throw up the bleſſings they have long and freely enjoyed under this government, for the confuſion they would ſuffer, were they under no government at all, or for the tyranny they would feel under their darling republic—a form of government more ſpeculative than practical, which would be only tolerable, if ALL *men were honeſt*, but which muſt be very defective as MOST *men are otherwiſe*—where beſt adminiſtered, it is leſs a friend to true liberty, than that excellent form of government under which we are happy, and under which the Americans have arrived at that ſtrength, which they now traiterouſly exert againſt the parent from whom they have derived it.

And now give me leave to obſerve, that the duty of this day's *humiliation* requires, not only that we ſhould humble ourſelves *before God* for our ſins, but alſo, that we humble ourſelves *in the ſight of men*, by correcting that pride and ſpirit of faction which is ſo prevalent among us, and which has drawn down this calamity upon us. Whilſt rebellion and war are diſturbing our colonies abroad, let us be particularly attentive for maintaining Loyalty and Unanimity at home. Rebellion, I truſt, we have no reaſon to fear; not becauſe we

have no enemies to our happy conſtitution among us, but becauſe the friends of it are ſo many, and the ſupport of it ſo ſtrong, that there is no danger of ſhaking it, whatever inclination ſome may have for diſturbing it. But, there is a defect in one part of loyalty, of which there is too much reaſon to complain; I mean a want of that reſpect which is due to Majeſty, which is a very material part in the duty of loyalty, and which, of late, we have ſeen too much laid aſide. *Honour the king* is a divine precept; and human government, though founded on liberty, allows not inſolence: however ſome may behave, as if That was the life and ſpirit of our conſtitution which is the poiſon of it; rudeneſs, where reverence is due, weakens authority; and a ſure means for making the people unruly, is, to make any part of the ſupreme power contemptible; nor will there ever be wanting a ſuſpicion, that thoſe who take pleaſure in making Majeſty contemptible, would feel a greater pleaſure if they could ſet Majeſty aſide. Temperate men are diſguſted at the too-common turn of ordinary converſation, which is ſuch, as if liberty was nothing elſe but a right to abuſe government: *free ſubjects of a free ſtate* is a deſcription of civil happineſs; but it is the reverſe, when men behave as if that freedom was only to be maintained by an indecent treatment of thoſe who are placed at the head of the ſtate. Either all ſocial and civil duties are nothing, and the Apoſtle's command *not to ſpeak evil of dignities* of no authority, or ſuch behaviour is a

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ſin, a ſin which demands repentance and amendment, eſpecially as the miſchief ariſing from it is as great as the ſin.

In difficult times, though the public means of ſafety lay in the hands of government, yet for ſucceſs in the application of thoſe means, much depends on the hearts and diſpoſition of the ſubjects: a due reſpect for government, with unanimity under its directions, ſtrengthens our hands in the uſe of our own powers, and beſt intitles us to Divine aſſiſtance; but inſolence and diviſion diſqualify us for the latter and weaken the former. All occaſions of contention therefore ſhould be avoided; and as wiſe governors on their part will take care to give no juſt cauſes of offence, ſo a wiſe and good ſubject, on his part, will be as cautious not to foment jealouſies—he will ſhew temper and candour in judging of the public meaſures, and be more ready to bear with ſmall grievances (if ſuch there really ſhould be) than to draw every thing he does not like into a handle for uneaſineſs. It is a difficult thing to give wiſe counſels in difficult times; but nothing is ſo eaſy as to find fault, and to repreſent the beſt-concerted meaſures under a diſadvantageous light—*This is a very ill office*; for as miſunderſtandings grow, diſaffection grows up with them, and where there is a want of confidence there can be no unanimity. When men in private ſtations take upon themſelves to decide upon the public meaſures, it ought to be done with great caution and modeſty; for the ſprings of government lie concealed, and to judge without knowing theſe,

is to conclude without firſt principles. Even when miſtakes in government are clear and evident, they will ſometimes be much better gently treated, than warmly reſented; miſtakes may be either of no great conſequence in themſelves, or they may be ſet right by future management; but ſtrife and contention among public bodies of men are always dangerous, and when once they begin no one can tell where they will end. For theſe reaſons it muſt appear to be of the greateſt conſequence to the common weal that we all of us pay a juſt deference to the wiſdom of our ſuperiors, nor raſhly cenſure what we cannot preſently ſee cauſe to approve: there are ſome things, which *muſt* be left to time, to ſhew themſelves, and in dubious caſes, as it is always juſt, ſo it is generally ſafeſt, to preſume on the favourable ſide; this makes the reins of government ſit eaſy in the hands of thoſe who hold them, and gives them heart to purſue the common intereſt with reſolution and chearfulneſs; but popular diſcontents turn the *public care into private caution*, and may be ſometimes a temptation for *purchaſing perſonal quiet, to the detriment of the ſtate.*

It is great want of candour to impute the preſent war to government, as the cauſe of it; government acts merely on the principles of ſelf-defence, againſt the miſchief, which others have thrown before it. *Who* they are the Apoſtle hath told us; *from whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your luſts? Ye luſt and have not,*

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ye kill, and deſire to have, and cannot obtain. James iv. 1. But however the paſſions of men may have raiſed this war, the progreſs and conſequence of it are in the hand of God; man may work miſchief, but it is God, who out of miſchief brings forth good: and this war may operate to the good of this kingdom, if, in its progreſs, it ſerves to ſhorten the enormous ſtrides which both avarice and luxury make among us—if it ſerves to awaken in us a better ſenſe of religion under the mild influences of frugality and moderation, than we have lately ſhewn under the mad intemperance of licentiouſneſs and faction; both which are not more detrimental to the ſtate than they are offenſive to God, on whoſe favour we depend both for perſonal and national bleſſings, which we have no reaſon to expect but through obedience to his will, or a true repentance for our want of it—a repentance, which conſiſts not merely in the ſolemn obſervance of this day, but in rectifying our hearts and our behaviour by that moſt excellent religion under the profeſſion of which we live, and, was our practice anſwerable to our profeſſion, might live the happieſt, as we are the moſt enlightened people upon earth.

The Chriſtian religion, if men will take it to their hearts, is well adapted for making *good members of ſociety*, and when blended, as it is, with the civil eſtabliſhment of this country, is well adapted for making *good ſubjects:* a contempt of religion itſelf is fatal to community, as it throws down the barriers, which ſhould reſtrain the paſſions of men from breaking

breaking looſe upon it, and an enmity to religion, as eſtabliſhed in the church of England, has ever been found highly prejudicial to the civil conſtitution of this kingdom, which it is well adapted to ſupport, and with which it is ſo ſtrictly connected, that, as *former* experience has ſhewn, thoſe who have been enemies to the one, have been the ruin of the other—an event, which, as it is never likely to be forgot either by the friends or enemies of our conſtitution, ſhould always keep the former on their guard for preventing a repetition of it, as *preſent* experience ſhews the latter will be always watchful to repeat it.

I ſhall conclude with the Apoſtle's advice, ſuitable to all ſeaſons, ordinary or extraordinary—*Fear God and honour the king*—the ſhort, practical meaning of which is, that we ſhould ſtudy to be *good men* and *good ſubjects*—Duties, which hardly ſubſiſt, at leaſt are not worth much, when ſeparated from each other; but when they are united, they form a character, which well deſerves admiration here, and will certainly meet with a reward hereafter.

F I N I S.

A

SERMON

Preached before the

Incorporated SOCIETY

FOR THE

Propagation of the Goſpel in Foreign Parts;

AT THEIR

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

IN THE

Pariſh Church of ST. MARY-LE-BOW,

On FRIDAY *February* 20, 1789.

By the Right Reverend

SAMUEL Lord Biſhop of *GLOUCESTER.*

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